

A Greater Christmas

By

A. Edwin Keigwin

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A Greater Christmas

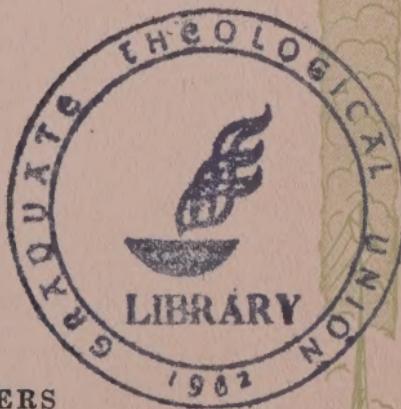
BY

A. EDWIN KEIGWIN

*Pastor of West End Presbyterian Church
New York*

AUTHOR OF

"THE HEART SIDE OF GOD," "THE NEW PATRIOTISM," ETC.



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*"I travail in birth again until Christ
be formed in you."*

St. Paul.

To
the friends and fellow-laborers,
members of
West End Presbyterian Church,
whose unfailing love and loyalty
is to me a priceless possession,
This Book
is affectionately inscribed.



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I

THE CHALLENGE

"I WANT a Christmas that goes with great cities; a Christmas that goes with the Singer tower and the Imperator. A Christmas that is afraid, that does not dare to tackle a big, serious, actual social human fact, that in its secret heart longs for dells to be good in, we will not be put off with."

Such are the words in which Mr. Gerald Stanley Lee voices a growing sentiment. The world of big things and bigger men resents the apologetic presentation of an emasculated gospel. "The challenge goes out from a world of men to the churches. Give us a Christ who grapples with things. We will not have a weak Saviour who says 'Please,' a plaintive person, a lovely outsider."

To find a challenge of this nature in a widely read secular magazine is

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significant. With nothing to take its place, the world is coming back to that authority which we thought forever relegated to the attic and the dust of ages. The antique is again in vogue.

There are very many straws to indicate that the tide is setting in. Here is another, an editorial, from a New York daily, in which the ring of the same challenge is clearly discernible. The evident intention was to record with pride another victory for American invention. But, the trans-Atlantic telephone receives scant praise as, driven by intense human longings, the editor proceeds to draw a deadly parallel. "The striking thing is the contrast between the successful results of applied science and the blundering failures of modern statecraft. While inventors are binding the world together in one great community, annihilating distance and destroying the old geographical isolation, political (and ethical) leaders are

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a thousand years behind the times. We are as helpless, in the grip of blind sociological forces, as were the ancients. Until the moral leaders get abreast of the electrical and mechanical engineers, the inventions and mechanical achievements will continue to be turned into instruments of wholesale destruction and horror. Before we can take another step in progress, there must be Edisons in the field of ethical endeavor."

Grave is the indictment filed by an eminent British author and editor, Mr. G. K. Chesterton. "The whole collapse and huge blunder of our age is this: We have mixed up two opposite things. Progress should mean that we are always changing the world to suit the vision. Progress does mean (just now) that we are always changing the vision to suit the world. We are not altering the real to suit the ideal. We are altering the ideal; it is easier. The net result is this; we are Marxian one

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day, a Nietzscheite the next day, a Superhuman (probably) the next day and a slave every day. As long as the vision of heaven is always changing, the vision of earth will be exactly the same. The modern man will never change his environment so long as he is always changing his mind."

In the foregoing excerpts we are placed face to face with the noblest longings of an awakened world, the impotence of modern faith and the subtle causes which have wrought our humiliation. "They who debase their gods, will be debased by their gods." The proverb is hoary with approving years and surcharged with the thunder of Sinai and the verdict of the Judgment Day.

A weakened religion, doubtful of itself and hobbling about upon finite demonstrations is no longer tolerable. Nor will groping temperamentalism, fumbling expediency and distressing subjectivity much longer be acceptable as

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a substitute for faith. "We are in the presence of a spirit sternly contemptuous toward mere spiritual pretensions," as Dr. A. C. Hill puts it. The world is seeking a throne of ultimate authority, an authority that will bind all men in allegiance to high heaven and the flag of humanity.

Amid the interminable shifting of scenes—intellectual, ethical, national,—a solitary personality has retained His place in the cast as star of the first magnitude. The challenge "Give us a Christ that goes with great cities" is but the applause that precedes the reappearance of Jesus in that inspiring spectacle "*The Triumphal Entry.*"

The hour of destiny has struck, turn down the dazzling lights of artificiality that we may be alone with our thoughts as we behold the resplendent glory of the Great Christ.

II

A GREAT CHRIST FOR A GREAT AGE

IN the foregoing challenge the essential weakness of modern thought is unmasked. It is not vigorous, bold, daring. We celebrate the nativity of Christ, but we forget that nineteen hundred odd years have sped by since Christ was an infant. What we need is a heroic conception of Jesus, such as that expressed by the writer of the book of the Revelation, who sees Jesus in imposing form; His eyes a flame of fire; His voice as the sound of many waters; in His right hand the seven stars; in His mouth a sharp two-edged sword; His countenance as the sun shining in its strength; the earth melting like wax before Him; the armies of Heaven following upon white horses; a rod of iron in His hand; upon His head many crowns; on His thigh a name

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written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Here are marshaled the recognized insignia of power, that, to the best of human ability, the dynamic energy of the superhuman Jesus, may be portrayed with the fidelity of a camera. Only with such a Christ, glorious, majestic, conquering, can we provoke enthusiasm from an age such as ours. It is this kind of Christ which the church is challenged to present. Such was the Christ whose advent Isaiah prophesied in the immortal words, "His name shall be called the Mighty God."

Would it were possible to impress every Christian with the importance of getting a *big* idea of Jesus! If our religion is to keep pace with the trend of the generation this is imperative. "Power" is the coin word of the hour; it is the personification of the spirit of the times; it is the crowning glory of this truly great age. Horse power, steam power, man power, heart power;

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but, what is greater than God power? Think of it! Let the mind dwell upon the thought—absorb it. And understand, Isaiah is not saying that Jesus is a *channel* of God power, or an *illustration* of God power. Avoid that pitfall. The Hebrew word here translated “God,” is never used symbolically, or metaphorically, or in a secondary sense, but always literally. Nor is the word ever used to designate any man save Jesus. The word means “God Himself.” Isaiah declares Christ to be the Divine energy lying back of all God-like manifestation.

How wonderfully Christ fulfilled this prophecy during his short earthly career. In reading the New Testament, one cannot fail to note the resemblance between Jesus and God. Every creative act, ascribed to God in the Old Testament, in the New Testament is ascribed to Jesus. Throughout that matchless ministry, Jesus constantly re-

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iterated the claim of identity with God and demonstrated its reality. Was it not this very claim that so outraged the Scribes and Pharisees, forming the basis of their most specific charge against Him? "He maketh Himself equal with God." Jesus boldly announced himself possessed of every attribute of God, even power over death. "No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have *power* to lay it down, and I have *power* to take it again." And we remember that when they brought to Him the sick of the palsy, and the Scribes said within themselves, "This man is a blasphemer," He turned upon the doubters with the words, "But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath *power* on earth, He said to the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed and go to thy house."

And think of the superb confidence with which Paul speaks to a scoffing world, "I am ready to preach the

Gospel even in Rome, for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the *power of God.*" In this case the word translated power is the Greek "dynamis," from which is derived our dynamite. Christ is the dynamite of God. Nothing weak in that conception of Jesus. Paul is in no danger from the ever prevalent and fashionable disease, skepticitis. Imagine, if you can, a man with such views relegating Christ to the nursery, the sewing circle or the pink tea. No, Paul thrust his standard into the very forefront of world power and conflict, at Rome, as he ranks Christ "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." There's a working faith for you. A faith to inspire self-respect and make itself respected even in a materialistic and militaristic age.

What a *big* idea those early disciples

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must have had, to acknowledge the Kingship of Jesus amidst the pomp and splendor of Roman power. Picture the authentic scene of their first acknowledgment. It was at Cæsarea, the New York of Palestine; the seaport into which poured the armies and wealth of a world empire. As one approached from the sea, the most striking object, among the many beautiful buildings, was a marble temple erected to the memory of Cæsar Augustus. It was the shrine of Roman worship of military power. But, literally, standing under the very shadow of this imposing temple, the first disciples deliberately turned their backs upon world power and gave their love and allegiance to Jesus, the idealist.

Thus both the parallel and the contrast between God power and man power have been clearly drawn from the first century to the present. "His name shall be called the Mighty God."

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"Christ the power of God unto salvation." This is the great Christ for a great age.

Do you know of anything more needed to-day, among Christian people especially, than just such a *big* idea of Jesus? We have whittled Him down, and analyzed Him, and ground Him in the mortar of speculation and reduced Him with the acid of criticism until there is nothing left but a sweet-spirited, gentle idealism. Those who have a big idea of Jesus will not stumble over mere details of the nativity story, the nature of miracles, the mystery of the resurrection, and the probability of the second coming. Jesus went to the root of all unbelief when He said, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures or the *power* of God."

There are two conceptions of Jesus that we must avoid. We are not to think of Jesus as so loving and indulgent that men may do as they

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please, neglect and reject Him, and at death be received into everlasting habitations, with the plaudit, "Of such is the Kingdom of God." Nor are we to think of Him as being all thunder and anger. In the emasculated gospel of recent years we have presented a Christ not worthy of more than the ordinary respect accorded to any good man of our own generation. We need to preach Jesus as the Mighty God, with a mighty big heart, but a mighty long memory.

I know very well there are those who speak disparagingly of a faith that makes such a conception possible. Notwithstanding, whatever one's views may be of Jesus and His matchless life, they are all alike founded primarily upon faith. To say that Jesus was not very God requires quite as much faith as to say that He was. The only difference is just here—the former faith is negative, destructive, while the latter is positive and constructive.

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Either is an intellectual venture, pure and simple, but that venture is the outstation of spiritual progress.

There lives near New York a man who has won for himself a wide reputation for restoring broken down captains of industry and finance. His method is exceedingly simple. He begins the restorational routine of each day by standing the men in line, and then he hurls this command at them like a thunderbolt, "Look up! If more people would look up in life, fewer would fall down. Look up, and you will be a new man." This is a broken down age, a broken down world, and we need some prophet of the rugged proportions of Isaiah or Paul to make us toe the mark and command us to look up. The Greek word for man means "up-looker." Look up, my friend, get a big idea of Jesus, and you will find that your whole spiritual, intellectual, and moral nature will enlarge enormously.

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This leads us to the sweetest of all Christmas thoughts—sweetest, because it brings Christmas into one's own personal life. When we gain this big idea of Jesus, we make the glad discovery that this dynamite of God is a friendly power. It operates in one direction—"Christ is the power of God unto *salvation*." In this respect Christ's power is quite unique. Can you name any other known power which uniformly works for salvation? In its very nature, power is destructive. This fact is taken into account before energy of any kind is utilized. In boiler, dynamo, gun, nation and individual, power begins to destroy almost from the moment it first exerts itself. Saving power; this is what the world is seeking.

Christmas is celebrated everywhere, even by Jews, Turks and infidels, because the conviction is growing that in Christ-power alone is there hope of salvation for the human race.

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Let us get a big idea of Christ this Christmas—at least nineteen hundred and fifteen times bigger than it was that night when the Holy Infant was placed in Mary's arms. Christ is no longer a babe,—except in the heart that has just received Him.

III

THE HALO

CIVILIZATION has collapsed for obvious reasons; it has become an empty robe, a tenantless structure. Burke wrote, "Our civilization has, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles—the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion." Decay set in because the spirit left the body. When Civilization became Knickknacks and Culture became Kultur, the throne of Christ was usurped by Kings of finance, and what not. We prated of a kingdom wherein dwelleth righteousness, justice and brotherhood. True to every law of logic, we have found the kingdom partaking of the nature of its king. The demand for a greater Christmas, a greater Christ, is an appeal for reality. Men are no longer satisfied with holi-

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day tinsel. There is a growing conviction, that in Christmas is 'a hidden source of power,—power that will compare favorably with the most striking examples of physical greatness. To tap this spring of energy and analyze its nature is the goal of our quest.

Some things are so sublimely great that they defy portrayal. They must be seen or experienced to be appreciated. It is told of a celebrated artist that he journeyed many miles to the Grand Canyon and came away without so much as unpacking his brushes. When pressed for the reason, his reply was: "I could not insult God." So, language breaks down, the imagination is bankrupt, when one seeks to delineate the greatness of Jesus.

True, many have been the attempts. Some have sought to depict Him in colors historical; but the portrait was merely that of a man. Others have painted Him in ethical terms; but the

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picture was that of an ideal. Yet others have dipped their brushes in their own hearts and upon the sky mixed mystical colors; but art critics pronounce it the portrait of a phantom.

There was ample justification for the action of the Constantinople Council (A. D. 754) which declared, "Christ is too exalted to be figured in human art." With the best of motives and under the most favorable circumstances the artist works with inadequate pigments. His painting reflects human imperfections more than it does the glory of Christ. The resemblance between the picture of Jesus by Albrecht Dürer, and a portrait which the artist made of himself at twenty-eight has been commented upon.

Those of us who have visited the cathedrals and galleries of Europe will fully appreciate the remark of a Greek monk to Titian, "Your scandalous pictures are as bad as they can be." It

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could not be otherwise. And to-day's would-be artist of the invisible need look for no better reception for his portrayal. The canvas must be stretched and the colors spread by unseen hands or the picture of the great Christ will remain unpainted.

In the fifteenth century, there emerged, from an obscure home in Italy, a man of rare genius and surpassing versatility. He was a painter, sculptor, architect, engineer, inventor and man of science. He designed bridges, scaling-ladders, breech-loading cannon and the most ingenious mechanical toys. He made lions that walked, lizards that rolled their eyes, and birds with flapping wings. Almost nothing seemed beyond his power and ken. The greatest product of this mind and heart was a well-known painting, "The Last Supper." Leonardo da Vinci devoted ten long years to this noble work. His brush assembled the disciples of our

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Lord and escorted them, one after another, to a place at the sacramental table; it traced in the Master of the feast and arranged the drapery of His garments. But, at that point the brush rebelled. The genius of Leonardo was baffled. He could not paint the face of Jesus. Long did he pray and wait for the inspired moment—but it never came. He died leaving less able hands to finish his masterpiece. All reverent scholars, historians and preachers are supremely conscious of the same limitations.

Personality is elusive. The fragrance of violets cannot be captured by the speediest lens or the ablest brush. Personality is the fragrance of the soul. Long before psychologists began to speak of our “astral bodies” great painters realized the presence of a form within the physical form. Hence, when completing a portrait or an image the old masters encircled the head with a ring

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of gold. The halo represented personal values, which, though perceived, escaped the brush. It is this mysterious element of which Christmas speaks to us.

Personality is a paradox, according to St. Paul, "Unknown and yet well known." True of us, it is more true of Jesus. A beautiful chastity is peculiar to personality. Only upon rare occasions and to kindred spirits does Christ reveal His glory and power, and then but for a moment. It is a snapshot; but that treasured picture-memory becomes the beckoning angel that leads the soul to another unveiling, and another, and still another. So each succeeding century has brought man closer to Christ, as it has led him nearer to the stars, the wisdom of yesterday becoming the ignorance of to-day. Christ and Christmas should mean more to this than to any former generation. That He *is* more, the challenge, "Give

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us a Christ that goes with big things," is abundant evidence.

The elusiveness of Jesus is at once His charm and our incentive. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honor of a king is to search out a matter." The thought expressed by Solomon is this: the higher instincts of man demand a soul-spur, which concealment alone affords. When we think we have arrived at the goal of inquiry, we discern, to our surprise and intense delight, that we have but made a beginning. There is an exhilaration of adventure in the pursuit of the elusive. Without doubt, this accounts, in some measure, for the fascination which has kept the eyes of all classes and conditions of men fixed upon the Bethlehem star.

The heart of the race is young, not old. The mind of man is alert, not atrophied. The faith of humanity is virile, not dead. Therefore, the world

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turns to the future with the eager expectancy of one who faces the dawn. It is morning on the hills of history and the valley is astir. We salute the rugged mountain peaks, yonder; inspiring ascent; our joy and defence throughout intermittent days and nights. We bow to the art of Greece; we bow to the scholarship of Germany; we bow to the literature of England; we bow to the jurisprudence of Rome; we bow to the invention of America. But the "Sun of righteousness ariseth, with healing in his wings." We worship Christ.

IV

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

WE live in two worlds—the world without, and the world within; the world of the seen, and the world of the unseen; the world of the real, and the world of the ideal. The one we call physical life, the other spiritual life. As a matter of fact, every physical activity is an effort to express, in some tangible way in the world without, as much as possible of all that is transpiring in the world within. The architecture, art, music, poetry, science, philosophy and invention, of every age, have been the material transcript of moods and tenses, emotions and visions of the inner self. Great passions have swept the invisible strings of human emotion, and the canvas, poem, and musical score have inscribed the story. Great visions have passed in panorama

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before the inner sight, and the sciences have declared the revelation. But the truest, noblest, loftiest expression of this inner life is found in religion. Religion is the transcript of a soul's emotion, or vision, when standing alone before the Maker.

Such is this transcript: "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead."* John has gazed into the inner world, and he seeks to acquaint us with what he has seen. In the first chapter of the Revelation he describes his vision of the *Great Christ*. The record is minute in every detail. It tells of Christ's countenance, eyes, hair, head, feet, garment, girdle, and voice. But that which impresses one more than all else, is the effect of the vision upon John himself,—"I fell at His feet as dead." These words furnish the theme for another Christmas meditation.

In these essays we cluster our thoughts

* Revelations i, 17.

about three propositions, which seem axiomatic. First, the measure of any man is the measure of his vision. John was a man of large vision, therefore John was a great man. The world has ever delighted to honor her prophets, poets and seers. We recognize that the greatest men are those whose vision penetrates the farthest into things of nature, or human experience. Man is by nature a seer. It is this God-like quality that differentiates him from the brute creation.

In like manner one order of man is distinguished from another. The narrower the vision, the more man resembles the beast; the wider the vision, the nearer he approaches Him in whose image he was created.

Now test this proposition by application to one or more of the various fields of human endeavor. Are men measured by their vision? Most certainly.

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The measure of the scientist is the measure of his vision. Who have been the world's great scientists? The Darwins, the Keplers, the Faradays, and the Newtons—men whose vision penetrated beneath the surface of natural phenomena. They saw more than their contemporaries, and that vision made them great.

The measure of the poet is the measure of his vision. Who have been the world's great poets? The Shakespeares, the Miltons, the Dantes, the Brownings and the Longfellows—men who could see forms of life in the rugged mountains, the changing foliage, and the dissolving clouds.

Similarly the measure of the Christian is the measure of his vision of Christ. Who have been the world's great Christians? Men like Saul of Tarsus, and John the beloved, and Stephen, and Hugh Latimer, and John Huss, the martyrs, and Fannie Crosby,

the queen of Christian song, who, denied the blessing of physical sight, continually stood in the presence of the invisible, and saw with ever widening vision the divine verities.

John had a vision of the *great* Christ. It was the vision of the Christ behind the Christ; the Christ within the Christ. It was not a vision of His humanity, but a vision of Deity. The study of the humanity of Christ is quite universal. Such a study is fascinating, but often wide of the mark. Vision is no more necessary in the study of the human life of Jesus than for the study of the life of Cromwell or Cæsar. Historical research is a matter of intellectual apprehension. Visions are soul-studies. One may read the story of Christ's earthly life and derive no vital knowledge of the Christ of all power and glory. Nor will one ever see Him thus, until with the eyes of the soul one looks beyond the facts of history

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and penetrates that realm across the threshold of the stars. This is not mysticism. With feet upon the ground, our foreheads must touch the clouds.

Let us consider one or two concrete examples of the importance of this inner vision. Christ had been speaking to His disciples; telling them of the Father's house of many mansions. As He concluded, "Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Philip is looking upon the humanity of Christ, and has not caught the vision of the Christ behind the Christ.

It is after the crucifixion; two disciples are on their way from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. They are disconsolate. Jesus draws near and journeys with them. They tell Him

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of all that has taken place,—as though He had not been the chief actor in the drama. Christ reproves them, and begins to unfold the Scriptures to these blinded disciples, who look upon Him, but know Him not. Upon reaching their destination, Christ accepts their invitation and goes in to sup with them. “And it came to pass as he sat with them at meat He took bread and blessed it, and their eyes were opened, and they knew Him.” They had seen His humanity, but now they see Him in His glory.

Such was John’s vision of Christ. Behind the mere facts of history, John saw the divine King of his life. Have you had this vision? Have you recognized something more than an historical personage? Have you seen Christ in some song you have heard, some affliction through which you have passed, some sermon to which you have listened? I ask this question, because the

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measure of your spiritual life and attainment is the measure of this inner vision.

V

THE SPIRIT OF A MAN

THE measure of the vision depends upon the spirit of the man. John, the revelator, described a distinct condition of mind which made possible his vision of the great Christ, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day." What are we to understand by this? We are told that John alludes to some special anointing of the Holy Spirit. Possibly so. But the simplest interpretation is perhaps the best for our present purpose. "I was in the spirit" certainly means that John had gotten himself into the spirit of the occasion; he had prepared himself to be carried away into the "seventh heaven," as he puts it. For that reason he was brought, very consciously, into the presence of the Almighty. Patmos was a holy place, because the only worshiper on

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that Sabbath was in a holy frame of mind. Had John been otherwise minded, there would have been no vision. The vision was not around him; it was within him. He was in a frame of mind, a condition of soul, that responded to the touch of God. Whenever a man is in the spirit of the occasion, he is sure to derive benefit. So we argue that the measure of one's vision depends upon one's spirit.

Is this in harmony with secular observations? Let us see. Yonder is a mountain. A man draws near to the mountain in the spirit of a builder. What does he see? Building stones, little else. Another approaches the same mountain in the spirit of a scientist. What does he see? Secrets—wonderful secrets, visions of the subtle working of invisible fingers. Yet another approaches in the spirit of an artist. What does he see? Perspective, coloring, form,—a picture. The spirit of

the man determines not only the measure, but the kind of vision.

Precisely the same law holds good in the realm of religion. One person approaches the church, the Bible, and Christ, in the spirit of criticism. What sort of a vision shall we expect for such an one? The very vision which he has,—imperfections. Another approaches in a purely scientific spirit. What does he see? Just what you would expect. Scientific inaccuracies and blindly credulous devotees. But, thank God, there are those who draw near in the spirit of faith, and with spiritual preparedness. Such men always gain a vision.

The sense of Christ is not intellectual; it is moral, like the sense of right and wrong. To say this, is not to belittle intellect. The mind is to the soul what a field glass is to the eye—it enlarges the scope of vision and gives clearness of definition to that which

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is remote. Even the highest power optical instrument cannot give sight to blind eyes. No more can intellect give sight to the spiritually blind. No process of reasoning will enable a materialist to understand a mystic. There are those who should never celebrate Christmas because they kill it. "Eyes have they but they see not, ears have they but they hear not, neither do they understand." Even at best we "see through a glass darkly," and, when not in the spirit of the occasion, we do not see at all. Therefore, we may not assert it too strongly, the measure of the vision is determined by the spirit of the man.

"The Spirit of man is the candle of the Lord."*

In every serious inquiry it should be continually borne in mind that the primary element in all knowledge is

*Prov. xx, 27.

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life. "He has no eye for art; no ear for music," is not to say that physical organs are dead or missing. It is only our way of noting the fact that the æsthetic instinct or capacity is dead or never existed. One must have a soul for art, music, righteousness, love, to perceive values in these realms. The basis of the larger knowledge of life is life. Knowledge is therefore within us, not without. Given this inner capacity for knowing, then the physical organs find, in the world without, abundant material with which to build up a sure defence of argument and proofs. This is the thought so strikingly and beautifully expressed in the proverb of Solomon "The Spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." Let a man take his candle to God for lighting and he may then enter the darkest chamber in reasonable safety. The candle may not dispell all the shadows, but it will at least

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enable him to see where to place his feet; and that is quiet sufficient, for we go through life a step at a time.

VI

THE VISION AND THE MAN

THE greater the vision, the more humble the man. The more a man really knows the more does he realize how little he knows. He is most likely to be appreciative of the worth of others who has the largest worth in himself. There is a reason for this. As the vision widens and deepens, we suffer by comparison, necessarily. How strikingly is this illustrated in the life which we have been analyzing. As he beheld the true glory of the Lord, the vision humbled and prostrated John, who declares "When I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead."

Such has ever been the effect of a vision of the great Christ. When Isaiah had that vision he cried, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in

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the midst of a people of unclean lips,
for mine eyes have seen the King.”*

A notable instance is also found in the story of the publican and the Pharisee. Two men in the same temple, upon the same occasion, and for the same purpose—to pray. Note the difference. The Pharisee is haughty and self-satisfied. Oh, the sarcasm of the Bible record! “The Pharisee prayed thus with *himself*”—not with God, he had not seen God, nor could he in such a frame of mind.—“Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men.” And the publican? He stood afar off. He could not lift his eyes to heaven. He smote upon his breast, as though he would say, “Thou wicked heart within me, thou cruel, cruel, black and sinning heart.” And then he prayed to *God*, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

These examples may be duplicated without number. Some men are proud

* Ezek. i, 28; Dan. viii, 17.

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and self-satisfied as they listen or read —because they have not seen the vision. They remark, "Oh, I am good enough! I am as good as the average." Press them further and they reply, "I believe in Christ, and acknowledge Him to be the only perfect man, but I feel no necessity of making a confession of my sins to Him." On the other hand are those who have the vision and recognize the humiliating contrast. They bow their hearts, as well as their heads, as they pray, "We leave undone the things that we ought to do, and we do the things we ought not to do." Be comforted, contrite one, this is an unmistakable sign that you have caught the true vision of a great Christ.

Years ago, in an Ohio city, there lived a gentleman of great influence and eminence. A successful barrister, he attended the church of his fathers with a good degree of regularity, but

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he had never made any acknowledgment of faith. His life was above reproach. He was easily the leading citizen in the state. Men in every walk of life looked up to him. One evening he informed his wife that he was going to his office to keep a very important appointment. He went by a side street, which he rarely used, and had almost passed a small church, when, through the windows, there came wafted to him on the wings of song those sweet words,—

“There’s a Stranger at the door,
Let Him in.”

He paused a moment, deliberately retraced his steps, and, urged by a sudden and subtle impulse, he descended the steps and entered the lecture room. For the first time in his life he caught the vision and definitely accepted Christ. Returning to his home, without going to his office, he met his dis-

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tressed wife at the door. "My dear," said she, "there are two gentlemen in the parlor who have been waiting for you for some time. They tell me they had an appointment with you at the office, but you did not appear. Oh! I have been so anxious, fearing that something had befallen you." Without a word of apology he turned to his wife, and with joy in every line of his countenance, said, "The most wonderful thing has occurred this evening." "Well, don't tell me about it now. You had better go in and see your friends." "No, I cannot keep it a moment longer. I have found Christ." "But," said she, "let's not talk about such matters here, we shall be overheard. Come back into the kitchen." He straightened himself up, a momentary flash of resentment kindling his countenance, as he said, "I have kept Christ out of my life for over forty years; do you suppose that I

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will now take Him into the kitchen?" Laying his hand upon the door of the parlor he entered, and there was no business transacted that evening. Frankly he stated what had occurred to him, confessed his inability to comprehend it all, and told his astonished friends the joy that had come into his heart at receiving Christ. That man was Chief Justice of the State of Ohio; subsequently, a member of the United States Supreme Court. What had transformed him? It was not argument. It was not a sermon. No great affliction which had cast its shadow athwart his path. It was a vision—a strong religious impression. For the first time in his life the mind had been sufficiently off guard and open for him to catch the vision of the Christ behind the Christ—the great Christ. May this vision be yours. Whatever your attainments, social position, or intellectual gifts, may you have the vision

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of John, and like him may you fall at His feet as dead, that He, reaching forth His hand of love, may touch you and say, "Arise and live." The measure of the man is the measure of his vision.

VII

THE WAY TO BETHLEHEM

"I CAME of Christian parents, and was reared in a Sabbath school. From childhood I have been a regular attendant upon the services of the sanctuary. I am now sixty years of age, and throughout my whole life I have been more or less concerned about personal salvation, having purposed, upon several occasions, to identify myself with the church. But, frankly, Sir, the process of becoming a Christian is still a great mystery to me."

The gentleman with whom I was talking was a commanding figure in the community. I have not been able to erase from my memory his concerned countenance and confession. And what is more, I have felt a certain sense of self-accusation, that such men could sit under my preaching without

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gaining a clear idea of a thing so elemental as the plan of salvation.

When allusion is made to the plan of salvation we think of something beset with endless terminology. We have come to associate salvation with such words as regeneration, justification, sanctification. There was a time when these words, as sweet morsels, were rolled under the tongue. Even the children had quite a clear knowledge of their meaning. But such is no longer the case—more's the pity. Perhaps, as some have said, these theological terms have muddied the stream of salvation—perhaps not. Be that as it may, the question of absorbing importance is how are we to make perfectly clear, to this friend of ours, the process by which Christmas comes to a human heart?

Dr. Archibald Alexander Hodge, that great theologian, required a volume of eight hundred and eighty-eight

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pages for his outline of the plan of salvation. But the founder of Christianity needed only nine words; and here they are: "I am the way, the truth and the life." All that Dr. Hodge has said in his exhaustive treatise is found embodied, in compact form and simplified, in these nine words of Jesus.

There are just three miles between a soul and Bethlehem. Mile number one—"I am the way." To become a Christian one must first of all definitely decide to put one's feet resolutely in the path of Christ's life. We have simply to say to ourself, the way to live is to live like Jesus; the way to work is to work like Jesus; the way to love is to love like Jesus.

The early disciples were not called Christians. No, Christian was a term of derision, first used at Antioch by those who cordially hated the followers of Jesus. The early disciples were called "the people of that W-a-y."

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When Saul of Tarsus went down to Damascus to arrest believers, his warrant read like this, "You are to arrest all the people of that *Way*, whether they be men or women, and bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

We read very little of theological unrest in the early church, except concerning the resurrection of the body. But they did discuss, and most earnestly, the *Way*. Hence we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "There arose no small stir about the Way." After telling just what was this way and how one must live to assure the Divine incoming, Jesus made the observation: "Narrow is the way that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it; broad is the way that leadeth unto destruction and many there are who go in thereat." So we see the first step, in the plan of salvation, is to set the feet in the w-a-y, without respect to what we feel, or how much we under-

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stand of the philosophy of salvation. It is to say, "To live like Jesus is the way to live. I will do it."

The next mile in the way to Bethlehem is, "I am the Truth." No man truly sets forth on the way of Jesus that he does not discover the truth as it is in Jesus. We talk about crumbling creeds. What is a creed? Creed is from a word meaning *I believe*. A creed is not readymade. We cannot buy it as we buy a suit of clothes. We can adopt a creed but it is not our own unless it expresses us. A creed is a discovery—an arrival.

The remark is often heard, "It doesn't matter what you believe." Quite true, if it is not your belief. But, bear this in mind, the man who is walking along the w-a-y "doesn't matter," can arrive at but one creed, the only one at end of that way—*doesn't matter*. It was quite another way along which Jesus and His followers took their wearisome journey

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—the way “it matters much.” Therefore did they arrive at clear-cut convictions regarding truth. Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” Jesus said, “I am the Truth.” But Pilate never arrived at the truth as it is in Jesus. Why? Pilate was not walking in the way.

It is splendid to be logical, but it isn’t salvation. It is perfectly logical to have a creed that expresses us. If we don’t care what we are doing our creed will be a don’t care creed, but if our feet are in the way of Jesus we are sure to find the truth as it is in Christ. Doing is knowing. “If any man will to do His will he shall know of the doctrine.” A great many reverse it. They say, “Well, when I can believe in the virgin birth, and the atonement, when I can understand the philosophy of the plan of salvation, I shall become a Christian.” That is most improbable. We cannot go the second mile until we go the first.

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Seeing is not always believing. Believing is seeing.

“I am the Life.” That is the last mile in the natal journey. When we have followed the way and discovered truth it becomes second nature. We begin to live it. The way, the truth, the life. The way—an act of deliberate choice; the truth—a discovery; the life—regeneration. This is the way to Bethlehem.

How clearly these mile posts stand out in the New Testament. Take, for example, the case of Simon Peter, in whom Jesus awakened spiritual yearnings by a call to service. “Do you want to make your life worth while? Follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men.” Immediately the nets are left and he follows Jesus. We discover no trace of intellectual transition or change of feeling. We read nothing of a cyclonic experience or spiritual convulsion. It is the simple winsome-

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ness of a wonderful, transcendent person which has caught his imagination. A vista of splendid idealism is suddenly opened by the challenge, and the fisherman turns from his nets and follows Jesus. Mile number one, the Way.

Passing over to the sixteenth chapter of Matthew we come upon the second mile stone in Peter's journey to Bethlehem. It was on the coast of Cæsarea Philippi that Jesus asked the disciples "Whom do men say that I am?" Public opinion was as much divided as it is to-day. "Some say thou art John the Baptist, and some say thou art Elias, or one of the prophets. People think well of thee quite generally." Without comment, Jesus makes the question very personal. "But ye, whom say ye that I am?" Peter is the only disciple who seems to have arrived at the truth, for he answers,—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That was a discovery.

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If, at the beginning of Peter's spiritual development, Jesus had inquired, "Do you believe in my Deity?" doubtless that disciple would have said, "Lord, what do you mean by Deity?" But he simply obeys the call to follow in the new way, and he comes upon the great discovery that Jesus is very God. Observe the immense importance attached to this confession of faith. Then said Jesus, "Because flesh and blood have not revealed it unto you, but my Father which is in heaven, I shall build my church upon this rock of personal acquaintance with God, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Mile number two,—discovery of Truth.

Turning now to the Acts of the Apostles, second chapter, we witness the arrival at Bethlehem. It is the greatest day in religious history, the day of Pentecost. A diverse multitude from every nation is assembled for wor-

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ship. They need a point of vital contact with God. There is but one man able to provide this. Peter arises and so effectively reveals the full glory of Jesus to the awakened spiritual consciousness of the assembly, that in one day, Christ is born in three thousand hearts. There is Life! Life that reflects life; life that begets life.

Mile one,—“Follow me.” Mile two,—“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Mile three,—power. Mile one,—an act of deliberate choice. Mile two,—a discovery. Mile three,—life. This is the way to Bethlehem.

Such is the plan of salvation. Nine words, the whole sum and substance of efficient living and eternal felicity. “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” If you would know the love and power of Him whose birthday we celebrate, stop magnifying difficulties, and follow Jesus. If you desire a creed that you can really believe, cease try-

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ing to adopt another's creed, and, by following Jesus, arrive at your own creed. If you would live and breathe and have your being in Him, do not endeavor to galvanize yourself into artificial life; just let the glorious truth as it is in Jesus, flood and transform you.

I have been told of a wonderful plant that grows in New Zealand,—the cara plant. It has singular habits. Upon emerging from the ground, it sends forth little feelers which creep about, in every direction, in search of a tall tree. When once the tree is found, the cara plant cuts loose from its root and begins to climb, up, up, up, until reaching the highest branches, it bursts into a hundred gloriously beautiful red blooms. But, failing in their quest for a great tree, the feelers fasten upon the root of the plant, and the cara chokes itself to death.

The human soul is a cara plant, which sends forth mind and heart feel-

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ers. If the sturdy superhuman be not found, those feelers lay hold of the root of the soul with a death grip. But with the finding of a *great* Christ, the soul cuts loose from the earth root, and the heart and mind begin to climb, up, up, until the spiritual life reaches its full bloom in the heart of God.

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VIII

CHRISTMAS IN THE HEART

CHRISTMAS is a perpetual miracle. The Nativity is being celebrated somewhere all the time. The star shines and the angels sing whenever the Divine One enters a human heart. Only by personally sensing the sublime force within, does one come under the spell of the anniversary which has so grown upon the world's fancy. Scarcely a century ago Christmas was not celebrated, except by Roman Catholics and Episcopilians. To-day Christmas touches all space, all time, all men.

Christmas grips the heart of the world because the world is getting more and more on the inside of Christmas. Christmas *was* the meridian of time. Ancient history converged and modern history diverged at the manger. Christmas *is* the new-birth of man.

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Can a man be born again when he is old? That question was once asked by a scholar, Nicodemus. But it is no longer asked by true scholarship. Is regeneration a dogma or a fact? Science replies, it is a fact. The late Professor William James, of Harvard, explains the fact in terms that all can understand. Thanks to such philosophers the dark continent of human experience has at last been surveyed and charted.

We are told, by science, that, in addition to the ordinary, conscious self, there is a sub-conscious self, fully equipped with a set of thoughts, feelings, memories,—all separate and distinct from our conscious self. It is this inner self that dreams dreams, sees visions, responds to innumerable unseen forces and awakes to unexpected love. Into this sub-conscious self, we are told, the Divine life comes, from which mystic throne is wrought out a complete transformation of the conscious self.

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It is extremely doubtful whether Nicodemus or Paul knew aught of this scientific aspect of regeneration. But they knew the fact and proclaimed it. Following the example of the reverent magi—they thanked God for the star and did not attempt to analyze the infinite. Some are always trying to know immensity, but they do not recognize it when it comes knocking at their door with the hand of light.

Consider two instances, so well accredited as scientific data that they appear in a work on philosophy. "Professor Leuba, an Oxford graduate, a journalist of brilliant mind, had not entered church for eight years. He lived a reckless life, for weeks at a time intoxicated. When sober, though suffering torments because of his evil habit, never having a single desire to reform, on religious grounds, but thinking only of his wasted talents,—often vowing to reform and as often breaking his

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vow. On July 13th, 1886, at three o'clock in the afternoon, after a month of sobriety, in perfect health, without a thought concerning religion, he went to his room to review as a literary work, Henry Drummond's 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World.' Before opening the book, with nothing to suggest it, with absolutely no trouble about his soul, the words came to him, 'He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life.' He had read it before, but he says, 'I was now in God's presence; that made all the difference. My attention was soldered on this verse, and I was not allowed to proceed with the book till I had fairly considered what these words involved, feeling all the while that another being was in the room, though not seen by me. The stillness was marvelous, I was supremely happy. It was shown me, in a second of time, that I had never touched the Eternal.'

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I felt God's love. I felt I was before a loving Father. He did not scold me, but loved me most wondrously. Still I felt my doom was sealed. Then there crept into my mind a way of escape, gently, lovably, unmistakably. It was the old, old story over again. No words were spoken, but my soul seemed to see my Saviour.”

Even more striking is the case of Monsieur Alphonse Ratisbone, a free-thinking French Jew. He was irreligious and cherished a positive antipathy for a brother who was a Catholic priest. In Rome, at twenty-nine years of age, he met a French gentleman and was delayed by him at a humble church door, which he entered to pass the time of waiting. He saw nothing within to impress him, and says, “If any one had accosted me saying, ‘Alphonse, in a quarter of an hour you shall be adoring Jesus Christ as your God and Saviour; you shall lie pros-

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trate with your face upon the ground in a humble church; you shall renounce the world, and its pomps and pleasures, renounce your fortune, your hopes, and if need be, your betrothed, the affections of your family, the esteem of your friends, and your attachment to the Jewish people; you shall have no other aspiration than to follow Christ and bear His cross till death.' If, I say, a prophet had come to me with such a prediction, I should have judged that only one person could be more mad than he—whosoever, namely, might believe in the probability of such senseless folly becoming true. And yet that folly is at present my only wisdom, my sole happiness."

Paralleling the above testimony of science, just a single leaf from a minister's diary. He was fully seventy-five years of age, and had never experienced a religious emotion of any kind. Early one winter morning he went to his cellar for coal. As he deposited the

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scuttle upon the cellar floor, the light from his flickering candle revealed a soiled leaf from a hymn book. All that he saw was the title of a hymn, "Let Jesus come into your heart." For no conscious reason he picked up the paper and put it in his pocket. When he appeared before my Session he declared that he could not get the message of that discarded slip of paper out of his mind. He read and reread the words of the hymn until, finally, Jesus actually did come into his heart. What had happened? A soul had reached Bethlehem. Christmas had come to him in the winter of life. The little song, which carried the message to the man within the man, so endeared itself to my friend that the soiled leaf was preserved in his pocketbook, and three years later, at his request, it was buried with him.

Christ comes to the sub-conscious self, the humble manger of the soul, because usually there is no room for Him

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in the royal palace of the reason. When the soul's nativity arrives Christ enters the heart—as He came into the world—a babe. Strong minds rebel at nothing more than at this. Why rebel? Is it not the universal law of life? The great thoughts which have turned the tide of national or personal destiny came as the veriest of infants, to be pursued by unrelenting Herod, betrayed by Judas,—the avowed friend,—crucified by the brawling passions and buried in the tomb of some zealous heart, from which they finally arose in glory and triumph. With an infant's cry, God turned the world upside down and began anew. Thus only can the *great* Christ come to you.

In the hope that this anniversary occasion may bring heaven's richest gift to many, the concluding lines are dedicated to those who would know the mystic meaning of "Christmas in the Heart."

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I

No rank so low in life,
No work for God is done,
No call to enter strife,
No conflict hardly won,
No night so dark,
No terror stark,

But that somewhere within the soul's
dark skies,

Appears the Christmas star to longing
eyes.

Be as the shepherds, faithful to the thing
God bids thee do; then will the angels
sing.

Be true to Him, nor fear the drearest
night,

And He will bring the Christ Child to
thy sight.

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II

In deepest gloom and chill,
When clouds hang low and dark,
When tears the sad eyes fill
And death, a shining mark
Seeks in thy heart
To drive his dart;

Then as the Shepherds in the darkness
learned,
When voices from the sky their footsteps
turned,
To find the Child and promise of a day,
When in His manhood He would bear
away
All burden from the heart; then to the
sheep
They went again to watch, but not to
weep,
Thus while His promise tarries let us
wait,

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Though oft the path be rough—the way
be straight,
This Christmas Child will soon in stature
grow,
And leading on the hosts of God, will
show His might and power;
As riding in the van He comes
In favor both with God and man.
The grave of all its victory is despoiled.
And Satan, the arch enemy, is foiled.
Then weep no more, nor in the shadows
grope,
For Christmas lights the altar fires of
Hope.

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III

And ye who, chained by sin
Have oft withstood His grace,
And ne'er would let Him in,
But turned from Him your face—

A cruel wrong
To friend so strong!

Embrace this Christmas Child while yet
you may,

And oh, delay not, till that awful day
When, as a King, He sits upon His
throne,

And righteous judgments from the books
are shown.

Then, to approach Him through the ser-
ried host

Will be but as a culprit, to be lost.

To-day Christ comes to thee an Infant
Child,

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His voice as soft as babe's, His heart as
mild.

A little child is Jesus to the meek;
A little child is He to all who seek
His favor and His grace, with pardoned
sin;

Open thine arms, and oh! receive Him in,
To grow within thee, and to show how
each

A little child should be in life and speech;
Philosopher and sage and aged man
All must a child become—and this all can.

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IV

Not in a manger lowly,
Not in an ancient town,
Not in a temple holy,
Alone, may Christ be found;

But in this heart—
This sinful heart.

As softly night glides into dawn of day,
So, softly steals upon my soul the ray
Of that bright Christmas star, the sign to
earth

That Faith and Hope are ours, through
Jesus' birth.

When done with thy rebellion and alarms
This Holy Child will nestle in thine arms.

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